

Mary O'Connell, *Updike and the Patriarchal Dilemma: Masculinity in the Rabbit Novels*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996. xiv + 268 pp. ISBN: 0-8093-1949-7; cloth; \$34.95.

There are several reasons for not liking John Updike. At least three of the reasons can be expressed in zoological metaphors: stylistically, his words seem to multiply uncontrollably like rabbits; politically, during the Vietnam war, he was a conservative eagle; and ideologically, he is still supposed to be a chauvinist pig. Mary O'Connell's book seeks to challenge the stereotypical portrait of Updike by providing the first sustained reading of the Rabbit quadruplet (*Rabbit, Run*, (1960); *Rabbit Redux* (1971); *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981); *Rabbit at Rest* (1990)) from a gender theoretical viewpoint. O'Connell examines how Harry 'Rabbit' Angstrom, the protagonist of the quartet, experiences masculinity and how his gender identity affects his development and relationship with other characters. It is O'Connell's contention that, far from being a promoter of given gender roles, Updike problematizes socially constructed masculinity and reveals its limitations. However, O'Connell does not merely treat the Rabbit novels as case studies of actual gender positions but also links the problematic to its aesthetic articulation: to the form, structure, narrative point of view, and use of language. All this certainly sounds exciting and any reader of Updike is likely to expect radically new readings of the Rabbit novels. To a degree O'Connell succeeds in fulfilling the expectations she raises in the Introduction, but as a whole the book is somewhat disappointing.

First, O'Connell's version of gender theory turns out to be surprisingly shallow. The author is content with paraphrasing such grandmaster theorists as Freud, Lacan, and Cixous through their exegetes rather than going *ad fontes*. Furthermore, O'Connell seems to be

States and discusses the Augustana Synod, both in its relation to Swedish America and to Sweden. Of special importance here is Blanck's demonstration of how the Augustana Synod after the turn of the century was becoming dominated by the second generation and was relatively unsuccessful in attracting new immigrants.

Chapters Three and Four are studies of two Synod institutions, Augustana College and the Augustana Book Concern (ABC). The detailed research that underlies these discussions is impressive. No less impressive is Blanck's analysis of quantitative as well as qualitative sources, making possible a convincing argument both of the college's development from a transplanted Swedish institution to an American ethnic college and of ABC's impact as a cultural institution. While these were ecclesiastical institutions and were created with the intention of serving the church, the special status of the Augustana synod within the ethnic group as well as the vision of some of its leaders made it natural for these institutions to take on a cultural responsibility that transcended the religious function of the church. Among Blanck's convincing conclusions are that by the early years of the twentieth century the college had become and was perceived as 'central in creating and propagating a specifically Swedish-American identity' (121) and that the ABC 'was one of the most important building blocks in the creation of' this identity (181).

For some reason Blanck has not given titles to his chapters so a brief look at his list of contents does not give readers a clear impression of the structure of his book. His fifth chapter might have been called 'The Creation and Use of a Swedish-American Memory'. Important elements in the memory created by leaders in the Synod such as Johan Enander were the early presence of Swedes in America and the contributions of Swedish-American culture heroes. In creating a history that demonstrated their special place in American history, Swedish Americans were involved in a strategy used in virtually all American immigrant groups. The characters and incidents in these filiopietistic ethnic histories are different for each group but the basic plot is very much the same: our early presence and our special contributions give us a special right to a home in America. That Johan Enander could make good use of Rasmus B. Anderson's writings on the medieval period, turning his Norwegian story into a Scandinavian and Swedish one, further demonstrates the basic similarities of these mythic plots. Blanck shows how the brief history of New Sweden (1638-1655) – which in corresponding Finnish-American accounts is largely populated by Finns – became part of the story Swedish Americans told of themselves. In this story John Morton becomes a Swedish American and Swedish Americans are thus given a decisive role in the making of the United States: he casts the deciding vote in favor of adopting the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

Space does not allow a more detailed presentation of Dag Blanck's analysis of the creation of a Swedish American memory. In conclusion it should be noted that he has not only given a convincing account of 'The Construction of an Ethnic Identity in the Augustana Synod' but that he has done it in such a way that his work is an important contribution to our understanding of American ethnic history.